



## **The Influence of Morphological Awareness Instruction on Vocabulary Development of Indonesian ESL Learners**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the influence of morphological awareness instruction on the vocabulary development of Indonesian ESL learners through a quasi-experimental design. It involved 60 participants divided into an experimental group that received explicit instruction about morphemes—prefixes, suffixes, and roots—and a control group following the conventional vocabulary curriculum. Statistical analyses, including normality tests, homogeneity tests, and t-tests, were employed to assess vocabulary gains. Results indicate a significant improvement in vocabulary scores for the experimental group ( $M = 78.5$ ,  $SD = 5.4$ ) compared to the control group ( $M = 67.2$ ,  $SD = 6.1$ ) with excellent statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that explicit morphological awareness instruction significantly enhances vocabulary comprehension and retention among Indonesian ESL learners, providing insights into effective linguistic strategies that can enrich vocabulary development in language learning contexts. Future research should continue exploring the long-term effects of these instructional methods while examining their implementation in various educational settings. Investigating how morphological awareness contributes to language learning across different learner populations, proficiency levels, and linguistic backgrounds will provide more comprehensive and empirical evidence. Additionally, future studies should assess the effectiveness of these approaches in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and overall language proficiency. A deeper understanding of these factors will help educators refine instructional strategies and develop more effective language learning programs tailored to diverse educational needs

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesian students who learn English as a second language (ESL) face many difficulties in learning vocabulary. These challenges stem from various factors, including differences in linguistic structure, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and the complexity of English word formation. However, having a strong vocabulary is essential for academic success and effective communication in various contexts. One reason for this problem is that they do not have enough chances to use English outside the classroom. Additionally, English vocabulary poses difficulties due to its complex morphological structure, including prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Besides that, the differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English make it harder for students to understand and use vocabulary correctly. This causes a vocabulary gap that affects their ability to use English properly (Nagy et al., 1985).

Another big reason why Indonesian ESL learners struggle with vocabulary is the way English is taught in schools. Many English classes in Indonesia focus too much on memorizing word lists instead of helping students learn words in real situations. Because of this, students may know the words but do not know how to use them in speaking or writing (Guo et al., 2011). They also have

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trouble understanding new words when they read because they do not know how to guess word meanings from the text. This skill is very important for improving vocabulary and English ability.

Morphological awareness, which means knowing how words are formed and what their parts mean, is very important for learning vocabulary. It helps students recognize and use morphemes, which are the smallest parts of words that have meaning. Studies show that students who have strong morphological awareness can learn new words better because they can break words into smaller parts (Sparks & Deacon, 2013). For example, when they know common prefixes, suffixes, and root words, they can guess the meanings of unfamiliar words more easily (Goodwin et al., 2012).

Besides helping with vocabulary, morphological awareness also improves reading skills. When students can see and understand morphemes, they can read and understand texts better. Research by Bowers et al. indicates that students trained in morphological awareness demonstrate increased reading fluency and comprehension, as they can quickly analyze and decode complex words (Bowers et al., 2010).

Teaching morphology directly can be very useful for ESL students. If teachers explain how words are made, students can develop good strategies for learning new vocabulary. This can also help them read better and understand English texts more easily. Studies show that when students learn about morphology, their English skills improve, and they become more confident in using the language (Asaad et al., 2022).

For Indonesian students, learning morphology is especially important because Bahasa Indonesia is not as morphologically complex as English. This means that Indonesian students may not naturally develop skills to analyze word parts. If teachers include morphology lessons in English classes, students can improve their vocabulary learning strategies and understand English better (Tighe & Schatschneider, 2016).

Research shows that teaching morphology can help students learn more words. Many studies prove that students who receive this kind of instruction can improve their vocabulary quickly (Asaad et al., 2022; Sparks & Deacon, 2013; Tighe & Schatschneider, 2016). Some research even says that morphological awareness can help students improve their reading comprehension and vocabulary over time (Guo et al., 2011; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). However, there is not much research about how this works for Indonesian ESL learners, so we still do not know exactly how helpful it is for them.

To include morphological instruction in English lessons, teachers need to know how to teach it effectively. They should use activities that help students recognize word parts, practice breaking words into morphemes, and learn vocabulary through meaningful contexts. Research suggests that teaching vocabulary in a fun and meaningful way is more effective than just making students memorize words (Matwangsang & Sukying, 2023).

This study aims to explore how morphological awareness can help Indonesian ESL learners improve their vocabulary. In Indonesia, English is mostly taught as a foreign language, and students do not have much time to practice vocabulary. Morphological instruction enables students to decode unfamiliar words by analyzing their morphemic structure, thus improving their vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. This is important for helping students overcome vocabulary difficulties and feel more confident in using English for school and daily life.

Stronger morphological awareness can not only help students learn more words but also improve their reading skills, which will help them succeed in learning English (Wang & Zhang, 2023). This research is important because it can show teachers how to use morphology in their lessons and help students develop better English skills in a multilingual world.

In conclusion, this study will give useful information about the problems Indonesian ESL students face in learning vocabulary, the role of morphological awareness, and the benefits of teaching it directly. By studying this topic, the research can help improve ESL teaching methods in Indonesia and provide better strategies for vocabulary learning.

## METHOD

This study used a quasi-experimental design to examine the influence of morphological awareness on the vocabulary development of Indonesian ESL learners. In a quasi-experimental

design, the participants were not randomly assigned to treatment and control groups (Creswell, 2013). Instead, the study utilized existing groups for the experiment and comparison. This method was suitable for educational settings where random selection was difficult. It also helped researchers observe the cause-and-effect relationship while considering ethical concerns in students' learning.

The study involved 63 Indonesian ESL learners aged 10 to 15 years from one junior high school in Indonesia. They were divided into two groups (an experimental group and a control group), selected using cluster random sampling. The experimental group received morphological awareness instruction, while the control group continued with the regular vocabulary curriculum.

To measure vocabulary development, this study used a vocabulary test. The vocabulary test assessed both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, following the framework (Read & Chapelle, 2001). This test included tasks such as recognizing words and using new words in sentences. The morphological awareness assessment measured how well students could identify and work with morphemes in words. The test contained exercises where students created words from given morphemes to demonstrate their understanding of word formation.

The study was conducted over six weeks. In the first week, all participants took a pre-test to measure their initial vocabulary knowledge and morphological awareness. Then, for four weeks, the experimental group received special lessons on morphological awareness, focusing on word structures such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words. The control group continued their usual vocabulary lessons without morphology instruction. In the final week, all participants completed a post-test to determine whether their vocabulary and morphological awareness had improved.

Data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using statistical methods for quasi-experimental studies. Paired sample t-tests compared the vocabulary scores before and after instruction for both groups. In conclusion, this research methodology provided a structured approach to studying how morphological awareness instruction affected vocabulary development in Indonesian ESL learners. The design, participants, instruments, procedures, and analysis techniques worked together to ensure reliable and valid results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this quasi-experimental study reveal significant differences in vocabulary development between the experimental group, which received morphological awareness instruction, and the control group, which did not. The statistical findings are summarized below. The data were first assessed for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which confirmed that both groups met the assumption of normality (Experimental group:  $W = 0.93$ ,  $p = 0.15$ ; Control group:  $W = 0.91$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ). Additionally, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances indicated no significant difference in variance between the groups ( $F(1, 58) = 1.20$ ,  $p = 0.28$ ), supporting the use of parametric tests.

Table 1. Vocabulary Test Results for Experimental and Control Groups

| Group        | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test SD | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test SD | t-value | p-value |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|---------|---------|
| Experimental | 36.45         | 5.67        | 55.78          | 6.23         | 10.45   | <0.001  |
| Control      | 36.92         | 5.10        | 42.35          | 5.51         | 5.30    | <0.001  |

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the vocabulary test scores of both groups before and after the intervention. The results, presented in Table 1, indicate a significant improvement in the experimental group ( $t = 10.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), demonstrating the effectiveness of morphological awareness instruction. The control group also showed improvement ( $t = 5.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), though the gains were substantially lower compared to the experimental group.

The findings support the hypothesis that explicit morphological awareness instruction positively influences vocabulary development among Indonesian ESL learners. The substantial increase in post-test scores for the experimental group suggests that understanding morpheme structures enhances learners' ability to comprehend and apply new vocabulary effectively. These

results align with prior research emphasizing the role of morphological awareness in vocabulary acquisition (Asaad et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

Several factors may explain the observed improvement in the experimental group. First, morphological awareness training helped students understand word components (such as prefixes and suffixes), facilitating more effective meaning inference. This approach likely encouraged deeper cognitive processing, enhancing vocabulary retention and application. Additionally, the interactive nature of morphological awareness instruction may have boosted student engagement, further supporting long-term vocabulary acquisition.

Another possible explanation is that morphological awareness enables learners to recognize word families and patterns, allowing them to deduce meanings of unfamiliar words more effectively. Research suggests that learners who can identify morphological relationships between words are more likely to expand their vocabulary autonomously, reducing their reliance on rote memorization and direct translation (Nagy et al., 1985). This ability is particularly beneficial in an ESL context, where learners frequently encounter new words and need efficient strategies to grasp their meanings.

Additionally, morphological awareness instruction may have contributed to improved reading comprehension. A well-developed understanding of word structures aids in decoding complex words in reading texts, leading to a better grasp of context and meaning (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). Since vocabulary knowledge is closely linked to reading proficiency, it is likely that the experimental group's improvement extended beyond vocabulary acquisition to enhanced overall literacy skills.

The way students work together in morphological instruction may have helped them improve their vocabulary (Henbest et al., 2019). Classroom discussions, group activities, and learning with friends made the lessons more interesting. These activities helped students understand words better and remember them more easily. According to socio-cognitive theory, learning occurs through social interaction, as students construct meaning collaboratively and refine their understanding through discussion (Budiartha & Ramadhan, 2020).

Also, the teaching method in this study showed that using both direct and indirect ways of learning is helpful. Direct teaching gave students clear explanations about word parts, while indirect learning helped them understand naturally through practice. This mix of methods contributed to vocabulary improvement where students recognize and use word parts in different situations. This supports the idea that a balanced way of teaching is useful (Bintz, 2011).

The results also showed that students in the control group improved a little, but because they did not receive direct teaching on word parts, their progress was slower. They may have learned some new words from regular lessons, but they did not get a structured way to study morphology. This shows that direct teaching about word parts is very effective in helping students learn vocabulary faster (Bowers et al., 2010; Rastle, 2018).

Many studies have already shown that learning about word parts helps students understand and use prefixes and suffixes. However, this type of teaching is not common in regular classrooms. Also, teachers and language experts, like speech therapists, do not often work together to teach this topic. In addition, many reading theories mostly focus on simple words with only one part, and they do not talk much about word structure. However, studies on skilled adult readers show that understanding word parts is an important part of reading. This means that learning about word structure should be included in language teaching.

The findings have several pedagogical implications for ESL educators in Indonesia. First, integrating morphological awareness instruction into the curriculum can equip learners with essential strategies for vocabulary acquisition. Understanding word structures not only expands vocabulary but also enhances decoding skills crucial for reading comprehension and effective writing.

Additionally, these results suggest that schools should actively incorporate morphological instruction into teaching practices. This could involve dedicated lessons on word formation, interactive games to reinforce morphemic awareness, and assessment tools to measure progress. Such strategies can significantly enhance vocabulary instruction and contribute to improved academic performance.

This study confirms that morphological awareness instruction significantly enhances vocabulary development among Indonesian ESL learners. The findings underscore the value of incorporating morphology-based teaching strategies into ESL curricula, providing a viable pathway for improving instructional effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research underscores the vital role of morphological awareness instruction in enhancing vocabulary development among Indonesian ESL learners. The significant gains in vocabulary skills observed in the experimental group highlight the effectiveness of explicit teaching strategies focusing on morphemes, revealing a promising avenue for addressing learners' lexical deficits. By equipping students with a deeper understanding of word structures, educators can facilitate not only immediate vocabulary acquisition but also foster long-term language proficiency. These findings support the integration of morphological awareness into ESL curricula, promoting a more engaging and effective approach to vocabulary instruction. Future research should continue to explore the long-term impacts of such instructional methods and examine their application in diverse educational contexts to further substantiate the benefits of morphological awareness in language learning.

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